HIDDEN TREASURES

Land Stewardship at Its Finest

By *John Dickson*, Wildlife Biologist

Meet the Saloom Family. Originally from Enterprise, Alabama, Dr. Salem Saloom is a general surgeon in Brewton, where he has lived since 1979. Dianne, his wife, is originally from Chicago. Patrick is their 20-year-old son, a student at the University of West Florida majoring in marine sciences. Recently, Salem and Dianne spent a month on a medical mission to Togo, Africa, where he operated on 120 people. But Salem's typical day begins at 6:30 a.m. when he goes to the hospital, and ends well after dark where he can usually be found working on "the farm."

After purchasing the original 158 acres in Conecuh County in 1983 with the idea of managing the property for timber production and wildlife benefits, Salem and Dianne established Saloom Properties, LLC. They consulted a certified public accountant and tax estate attorney to form the LLC (Limited Liability Company) for estate planning purposes and tax incentives. Over the years, an additional 1,022 acres have been purchased surrounding the original tract. Hunting rights are currently leased on a 644-acre tract adjacent to the property to establish an adequate land base to practice quality deer management with plans of purchasing this tract in the future. Saloom Properties, LLC was certified as TREASURE Forest #414 in 1986.

After purchasing the property, Salem harvested 2,300 board feet of eastern red cedar from the property using a portable sawmill. Utilizing this timber, he built a cabin with a deck overlooking the pond. A barn and shed were also built to house tractors and implements.

I first met Salem in November of 2001 when looking over their property for the Land Stewardship Biologist Assistance Program, a partnership between the Alabama Forestry Commission, Alabama Wildlife Federation, Alabama TREASURE Forest Association, The Longleaf Alliance, and the USDA Forest Service. A three-year prescribed burning rotation for all upland pine stands was chosen and 400 acres were burned this past winter. High protein forage species and small grain mixtures that would maximize food plot productivity were planted for deer and turkeys. Perennial species have also been added to reduce planting time and costs. Native soft mast species such as persimmons and plums have been planted as well as native mast-producing hardwoods such as willow and water oak.

Dr. Salem Saloom using a drip torch during the prescribed burning of 400 acres on his property last winter.

Harvest data and observations have been recorded since the beginning of the quality deer management program. Buck sightings have more than doubled in the past three years. Twenty buck sightings were recorded for 2001, 32 in 2002 and last hunting season 43 buck sightings occurred. "Antlerless" deer sightings have remained constant over this time period, although doe harvest has increased significantly. Although not statistically tested, the data collected points to the fact that there is an increase in the number, age, and quality of bucks seen as the program progresses.

Dr. Saloom worked with the local Natural Resources Conservation Service district conservationist to apply for cost share assistance through the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP). Cost share assistance was obtained for implementing firebreaks, prescribed burning, and expanding food plots through a five-year contract. The firebreaks were planted in winter annuals after they were initially established. Prior to establishing permanent firebreaks, the Alabama Forestry Commission created firelines for prescribed burning. All acreage requiring prescribed burning under the WHIP program was burned this past winter. To achieve the long-term goal of increasing the total acreage in wildlife openings from 1% to 3%, two food plots were doubled in size and one new food plot was created. Salem also painted two miles of boundary lines and added iron gates to all entrances to restrict access.

Due to the sandy soils on the property, annual road maintenance is essential. The long-term goal of creating road access throughout the entire property was recently accomplished in 2003. Hundreds of hours of bulldozer work were performed to create new roads, "crown" roads, establish water bars and turnouts, create firebreaks, and expand food plots. In areas that are highly erodable, bricks, small gravel, and oyster shells have been added to prevent the soil from eroding. The steepest slopes are seeded with bahia grass and compacted with a cultipacker, while the firebreaks are planted in winter and summer annuals. Dr. Saloom received cost share assistance to seed the roads in highly erodable areas. Two stream crossings had 48-inch culverts installed and 32 dump truck loads of concrete and 20 loads of red clay to allow

(Continued on page 26)

The Alabama Forestry Commission and Illegal Dumping

By: *Douglas A. Smith*, AFC Retired

Why would the Alabama Forestry Commission (AFC) be interested in illegal dumping? The answer is because it has a responsibility in preventing wildfires.

The Forestry Commission is responsible for suppressing wildfires on approximately 22 million acres. Suppression is dangerous and expensive. There is expense in paying for the suppression as well as the damage caused by the fire. The solution is to prevent or mitigate as many wildfires as possible. One technique of mitigation is accomplished through prescribed burning which reduces the damage caused by an unexpected wildfire. Another technique is prevention by reducing or eliminating illegal dumps.

Illegal dumping appears to be an Olympic sport in some areas of the state. Both sociological factors and lack of landfills have an impact upon the location and frequency of this undesirable activity. The most common items associated with dumps are washing machines, clothes dryers, water heaters, construction material, and household garbage most frequently containing beer bottles and baby diapers. A typical location is a creek or drain leading into a waterway.

Regardless of the reasons, illegal dumps contribute to pollution, become an eyesore, and are a source of wildfires. It is common for a dump to grow in size and then be burned to reduce the quantity of debris. Burning also destroys evidence associated with those who dump.

For every fire that is prevented, there is one less fire to be suppressed. For each dump eliminated, there is one less likely source of ignition. Therefore, AFC investigators attempt to identify those who dump and prosecute them. Illegal dumping, a misdemeanor, must usually be seen by an officer in order to make an arrest. However, the legislature recently passed a bill that allows for a presumption of guilt with a chance for rebuttal. According to 13a-7-29 of the Code of Alabama, if a name appears on documents in the dump, then that person is presumed guilty unless they can justify their innocence. It is possible that the guilty party only deposited a small amount of debris or litter within a larger pile of debris. Without adequate rebuttal, the person can be charged by an officer and must appear before a judge to answer for the entire dump.

Some officers have access to video equipment that can be used to monitor dump sites. This system has some limitations but has been successful in several prosecutions. This type of monitoring has also revealed other illegal activity.

Sentencing for a class C misdemeanor is limited to $500 and/or three months in jail. Some judges modify the fine and require the guilty party to clean up the dump. This can become rather expensive if the dump is large.

Through a program offered by the Alabama Forestry Association, witnesses may be rewarded up to $5,000 for information related to a forestry crime.

When illegal dumping is defeated, we all win. Do your part to help protect the environment, enhance our view of nature, and reduce wildfires. It is all possible with one prevented or eliminated dump.

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(Continued from page 25)

access throughout the property. Two 10-foot by 8-foot concrete fords were used as were two steel Bailey bridges.

In 1984, a two-acre pond site was cleared and soil samples were taken to determine clay content and soil acidity by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The proper amount of lime was applied to neutralize the pH, and the pond was stocked with bream and bass purchased from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. White amur were also added to the pond to control aquatic weeds. The pond is fertilized every six weeks during the summer to increase fish production, and smaller bream and bass are removed from the pond to keep the fish population in balance. A Department of Conservation and Natural Resources fisheries biologist seines the pond every five years to determine how many pounds of fish should be harvested from the pond and inspects the pond periodically to determine aquatic weed species and control. Two herbicide applications have been applied to the pond to control aquatic plant species.

After Salem purchased the property, he applied herbicides to a two-acre kudzu patch. Herbicide applications have been applied several times to stop the spread of this invasive species. Cogongrass is also established in several areas and was sprayed recently with varying herbicide concentrations to determine which rate was most effective. Annual monitoring and herbicide applications will ensure that invasive species are controlled.

Since 1990, Dr. Saloom has been working with a registered forester who has recommended, marked, and overseen timber harvests through their completion. Three separate timber harvests were performed with wildlife management and water quality control as integral considerations in the process. The income derived from the timber harvests was reinvested into the property for further improvements.

Working with forestry consultants, wildlife and fisheries biologists, and other natural resource professionals, Dr. Salem Saloom has managed to derive income from timber production and create excellent wildlife habitat through good forest stewardship. He has utilized services offered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and the Alabama Forestry Commission to establish a long-term plan for his property and obtain cost share assistance for various management activities.